

CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. New Shows This Week

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Philadelphia's three daily critics raved about the adaptation of the French hit. But Waters, Variety, doubted if the grim play will have much of a chance on Broadway. He based this prediction on the fact that the show is an unrelieved tragedy which lacks conventional romantic interest.

Cancelled Opening

Gilbert & Sullivan-Hellinger; Opened 10/3/49-Closed 10/22/49. Fourth week of G&S Company cancelled. While many of the critics had begun to attack the productions with verbal jabs, Atkinson, Times, thought the company was beginning to shake down to a pleasant troupe.

N.Y. Closings

Blackouts-Ziegfeld; Opened 9/6/49-Closed 10/15/49. Ken Murray show closed without warning after 51 performances. Times, Tribune, Post, Sun, Variety, Christian Science Monitor, Newsweek, Time and New Yorker panned the show. News, Mirror, Journal, World Telegram, Women's Wear, Billboard thought the show was worth a visit. Atkinson, Times, said the show's trip from the West to the East Coast wasn't necessary to the safety of the nation.

Magazine Reviewers View the New Plays - digests on inside pages.

Browning Version-Coronet, 10/12/49. Though most of the magazine critics praised Evans and his double bill, Nathan, New Yorker, Time all voted 'no'. Time called the Rattigan play writing "not far from double bilge". Gibbs, New Yorker, still considers Evans a Shakespearean actor; while Nathan considered the bill a discredit to Evans. Rubin, Daily Worker, enjoyed both plays.

Touch And Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. The trade journal critics panned the Abbott revue. Bron, Variety, didn't think the show was substantial enough to remain long. Francis, Billboard, saw some good numbers, but not enough for a Broadway hit. Gibbs, New Yorker, listed the 11 sketches he enjoyed the most. Both Time and Newsweek called it a lively hit.

Yes, M'Lord-Booth, 10/4/49. Clurman, New Republic, deemed the English comedy "a thoroughly pleasant English trifle".

Twelfth Night-Empire, 10/3/49. All that Clurman got from the revival was a notion that Shakespeare was bisexual. He said that the words were cleverly spoken, the actors agreeable but all else in the production was lacking.

Twenty-five Years A Drama Critic

Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation, looking back at his first 25 years of being a drama critic discovered that he was never "stage struck". Instead he feels that his own enjoyment of the theatre comes from a sense of participation, both in the play itself, and in the reactions of the audience. "Perhaps the theatre is, indeed, the only truly catholic temple still standing and gathering the only worshippers not divided," he concluded.

H.M.S. Pinafore and Trial By Jury

e. Times-Pro: Very enjoyable performance, company finally shaken down into a pleasing troupe of light opera singers with a particular knack for the music. Principals on level with orchestra and chorus for first time.-Atkinson.

b. Tribune-Con: N.Y. could support a good G&S company, but this isn't it. This was clearly proved by meager turnout of local Savoyards and by the performances. Utter lack of style and inventive playing makes them appear awful.-McCord.

c. News-Pro: The only thing wrong with production of Pinafore is that it is being done in the wrong place. Should be done in Senate Chamber, because it is best argument in favor of B-36 yet advanced. Proves navies haven't changed since 1870.-
Sylvester.

d. Mirror-No review for the twin bill appeared.

c. Compass-So-So: Satire, wit, pure melodies make ears tingle even when the performers go about their business as if some very unkind person had frightened them the moment before they came on stage. Would be better if both cast and director had more confidence.-Pollock.

f. Post-So-So: Performance more bearable than previous one. Brightest feature of company is Kathleen Roche, who might be an example of her fellow players. Gives G&S role right sort of light, bantering humor and mock seriousness. G&S work still timely, but do wish shows were presented more effectively.-Watts.

g. Sun-So-So: Melodious evening, but short on sparkle and gaiety. Lot more in show than production has uncovered. If you are longing to hear the delightful Pinafore music again, here's a good chance. There is more in show to please the ear than tickle the funnybone.-Brown.

h. Journal American-Con: Shows need cheering and clearing up. What has happened to the American Savoyards to make them woefully Wagnerian? Shows presented with lack of Savoyardism, never has show been staged so solemnly.-Garland.

i. World Telegram-Con: When whole cast gets together on sprightly tune, result is excellently lusty and bright. Show is languid, often inarticulate and reprehensibly acted. Many high school groups have done better.-Hawkins.

j. Eagle-Pro: Chertock's experimental hope of establishing an American G&S company surely gave promise with show. Cast fully acceptable, enjoyed freedoms Engel took with the score.-Currie.

k. Newark News-Con: Lamentably lacking in style and precision. Once over lightly, elemental treatment of Pinafore which left everything to be desired.-Field.

l. Morning Telegraph-Con: If you like your Savoyards crisp, articulating perfectly and singing like larks, then you'd better wait until the full loaf comes along. Wish that producer assembled better outfit, one with more dedication.-Bolton.

m. CHECKING THE THEATRE ADS: "Has plenty of bounce and gaiety" is the phrase credited to Funko, Times. The drama editor of the Times wrote, "This Mikado has plenty of bounce, energy, and gaiety, but what is decidedly lacking seems to be a kind of style and polish without which the G&S mockery falls short of its potential."

Pirates of Penzance

a. Times-Con: Principal virtue is that it is always pleasant to hear. But on the whole it is not a satisfactory production. Show should be a satirical opera, not a romantic musical play in an obsolete style.-Atkinson.

b. Tribune-Con: Pedestrian performance wanting in style, pace and vocal proficiency. Orchestra does better than cast, not their fault there is difference of opinion on how the show should be done.-Barnes.

c. News-Pro: Sufficiently pleasing to eye and ear. Company pleasant, chorus does top numbers very well. If theatre should die (and I doubt it will) last performance will be of a G&S play, not Shakespeare or South Pacific.-Chpaman.

d. Mirror-Pro: Rowdy and rousing revival. Company more at ease, in better voice than for Mikado. No G&S company in memory has had a better singing chorus. A most promising organization that will improve with every performance.-Coleman.

e. Compass-So-So: There have been better G&S companies, but tunes, lyrics and plot sing way through the actors to ear of audience, and for all ears that dote on theme there is a pretty constant delight. Elemental production.-Pollock.

f. Post-Con: Lacks graceful style, quiet, ironic sense of humor, polished manner, and satirical point of view. Production is flat, uninspired.-Watts.

g. Sun-So-So: Better than Mikado, still somewhat below standards of other years. Put down the current presentation as passable.-Morehouse.

h. Journal American-Pro: No recent tackling of show has given it the "zest" the new American Savoyards give it. Appropriate scenery, appropriate costumes, appropriate production. Cast works worthily together. Riggs top man.-Garland.

i. World Telegram-So-So: Falls wide of its mark. Would be rather a pity to start one's G&S acquaintance here. But for old timers, there is no call for anything but to relax and mouth the lines along with the players.-Hawkins.

j. CHECKING THE THEATRE ADS: The Times ad headlined "The Critics Hail the Refreshing, New G&S Company" offers Chapman's quote from the news as typical. "The people at the Mark Hellinger Theatre are good companions, so why not go one of these nights?-Chapman, News" reads the first quote in the ad. Chapman said: "Any kind of G&S is better than no G&S, and the people at the Mark Hellinger Theatre are good companions. So why not go one of these nights?"

k. Wall Street Journal-Pro: Few shortcomings have in no way impaired the general enjoyment of the operettas. The performers continue to shine, high praise is due the chorus. After some practice and a bit more experience, the group should be giving a well knit performance.-Cooke.

l. Newark News-Pro: Servicable revival pleasantly sung, acted along conventional lines. Slightly melodic return of old favorites with competent cast.-Field.

m. Variety-So-So: For faithful Savoyards, this is practically undiluted bliss, for audience not infected with G&S idolatry, may seem quaint.-Hobo.

n. Billboard-Pro: Better than first production, acts are bright and cheerful, costumes keep them good company. Engel gives fine reading of score, and cast-wise matters are traditionally lusty.-Francis.

The Browning Version and Harlequinade

a. Daily Worker-Pro: Evans proves again that he is one of leading actors of our day. Intense, restrained performance, smooth direction.-Rubin.

b. Wall Street Journal-Pro: Shows Evans as adept with modern roles as with Shakespearian. First has depth of feeling, direction to be commended. Second is ragbag of buffoonery, but lots of fun in it.-Cooke.

c. Journal of Commerce-Pro: Season moved man-sized step in right direction. Evans, Best, both old friends in new dress. Presented with such astute showmanship and performed so well that the familiarity of them need hardly hinder your enjoyment of thing.-Single.

d. George Jean Nathan-Con: Neither item amounts to much critically, both cover ground we have long been chummy with, they manage to provide some diverse entertainment and serve to pass an evening for the not too demanding customer. Rattigan seems often that of tinfoil wrapped around penny candy, not satin sheen. On the whole the bill is a big discredit to Evans.

e. Variety-Pro: First is taut, engrossing, expertly and touchingly played. Second is disappointment, lightweight antic with little development or distinction, less effectively played. Strength of first will bring whole into moderate hit class, fine road tour and film possible.-Hobbs.

f. Billboard-Pro: Combination lets Evans prove again the brilliance of his approach to characterization, and his right to consideration as one of our best actors. First is grim vignette of frustration and futility, second is amusing trifle that sends the customers home happy.-Francis.

g. Christian Science Monitor-So-So: Find it hard to believe either the play or the title role are exactly of prize winning calibre. First show carried off because of fine supporting cast. Second is second-rate Rattigan.-Beaufort.

h. Newsweek-Pro: Eminently satisfying evening in theatre. First is deftly sketched in character study that provides Evans with worthy dramatic vehicle. Second is boisterous antic. First rate supporting cast, skillful writing.

i. New Yorker-Con: Follows pattern of usual school play pretty closely. No real tragedy involved in first, merely the crasing of a caricature. Pathos is so manipulated and contrived that emotion is less likely to be pity for the protagonist than exasperation with author. Evans remains defiantly and inescapably a Shakespearian actor. Happy with second because of its humor and charm.-Gibbs.

j. Time-Con: As play writing it is not too far from double bilge. As entertainment, first besides being almost exhilaratingly grim gives everybody a chance to act, second encourages everybody to over-cavort. First never seems real, though effectively contrived, played. Second occasionally funny.

k. Cue-Con: Sort of evening which slides mostly downhill. First is no world shaker, played with artful pains. Second is so much wilted salad after tood soup.-Gabriel.

Yes, M'Lord

a. New Republic-Pro: Thoroughly pleasant English trifle, gentle nonsense. Play amiable due to its lack of strain, its willingness to be brightly yet modestly trivial and for its old fashioned and admirably sound acting.-Clurman.

b. CHECKING THE THEATRE ADS: Hawkins, World Telegram, is quoted in the N.Y. Times ad for Yes, M'Lord as saying "Matthews is terrific in Yes, M'Lord." This phrase is nowhere to be found in the mild pro review for the English comedy. The headline used the word 'terrific', but not Hawkins.

Touch and Go

c. Wall Street Journal-Con: Remarkable for lack of distinction, dancing mediocre satire seemed clumsy and tasteless in comparison to recent shows. Notable lack of talent, seem to have heard all music elsewhere.-Cooke.

d. Journal of Commerce-Pro: Enough comic inspiration, genuine talent for two revues. Worthy successor to Lend An Ear. Happily denuded of long boring intervals between highlights. Best tip is to see for yourself if it isn't one of the best entertainment buys in town-Single.

e. Morning Telegraph-Pro: Evening of pleasant irkless amusement, and the probability is that you will forget most of it before you get to the corner. Three outstanding numbers. Andrews able, MacDonell handsome.-Bolton.

f. Variety-Con: Some pleasant things, not enough to go places. Too thin and unsubstantial for Broadway. Some sketches funny, others fall flat. Too much dancing. Cast does chores well, but not enough brilliant opportunities to make this a click show.-Bron.

g. Billboard-Con: Revue like girl in nursery rhyme, when she was good she was very good, but she wasn't always good. Songs lyrics are pedestrian and labored, repetitious dance patterns. Two good sketches, but needs more.-Francis.

h. Newsweek-Pro: Has makings of hit, but doesn't blaze any new directions in the revue pattern. Highly serviceable score, talented young people. Enough top material to make it easy to overlook the occasional shortcomings.

i. Time-Pro: Lively topical revue, genuinely funny as well as sassy. More pertness than polish. Cast likable and young. Two top sketches.

j. New Yorker-Pro: More than usually rewarding evening. So much is bright, high spirited and altogether superior, seems pity to report that program contains few mildly embarrassing items. But 11 of 18 numbers are good. Lists them in order of preference, starting with 'Be A Mess', 'Gorilla Girl'.-Gibbs.

k. Cue-Pro: This town needed a good six dollar revue, now it has one. Witty activity, vivid surroundings, pleasant young company, all make for a high class evening's entertainment. Skits all fast, some furiously funny.-Gabriel.

Twelfth Night

l. New Republic-Con: Words clearly spoken, actors agreeable, but all else is lacking. Show can't live on stage today unless fresh, gay impulse is brought to bear on it. All I got from present production was a strong suspicion that Shakespeare was bisexual.-Clurman.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance - Ratings of 30 Reviewers.

A Streetcar Named Desire-Barrymore, 12/3/47. Pro: Times, Tribune, News, Mirror, PM, Post, Sun, Journal-American, World-Telegram, Brooklyn Eagle, Newark News, Women's Wear Daily, Wall Street Journal, Journal of Commerce, Morning Telegram, Variety, Billboard, Theatre Arts, Commonweal, SRL, Cue, Newsweek, Nation, New Republic, New Yorker. Con: Daily Worker, Catholic World, Christian Science Monitor. So-So: George Jean Nathan, Time.

As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48. Pro: 19 reviews. Con: Tribune, Star, Morning Telegram, Commonweal. So-So: News, World Telegram, Theatre Arts, Commonweal, Daily Worker, Christian Science Monitor. No review in Saturday Review.

Born Yesterday-Miller, 2/4/46. All 30 reviewers vote "Pro".

Death Of A Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 26 reviews. Con: Nation. So-So: Time.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 20 reviews. Unchecked reviews are Eagle, Newark News, Daily Worker, Nathan, Catholic World, Christian Science Monitor, Saturday Review, Nation, New Republic, Compass.

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 3/23/49. 30 Reviews for Mac, 30 against her play.

Goodbye My Fancy-Beck, 11/17/48. Pro: 18 reviews. Con: World Telegram, Daily Worker, Wall Street Journal, Catholic World, Nation, New Republic. So-So: Nathan, Cue, SRL, Time. No review in Compass, Christian Science Monitor.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 reviews. Con: New Republic. None in Nation.

Lend An Ear-Shubert, 12/16/48. Pro: 25 reviews. Con: Daily Worker, N.Y. Star, New Republic. So-So: Nation. None in SRL.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: Mirror, Sun, Journal-American, Women's Wear Daily, Morning Telegram, Billboard. Con: Times, Tribune, Variety, Theatre Arts, Commonweal, Cue, SRL, Time, New Republic. So-So: News, Post, World-Telegram, Newsweek, Catholic World. Others unchecked.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 23 reviews. Con: Christian Science Monitor. So-So: Daily Worker, Nathan, Morning Telegram. No review in Catholic World, Nation.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: Times, Tribune, News, Mirror, Post, Sun, Journal American, World Telegram, Women's Wear Daily, Journal of Commerce, Morning Telegram, Variety, Billboard, Theatre Arts, Christian Science Monitor, SRL, Newsweek, New Yorker. So-So: Cue, Time. Others unchecked.

The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48. Pro: 20 reviews. Con: Mirror, Star, Post, Sun, Journal-American, Journal of Commerce, Nation, Billboard, Nation. So-So: World Telegram, Eagle.

Where's Charley-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 reviews. Con: Post, Sun, Women's Wear, Daily Worker, Billboard, Commonweal, Christian Science Monitor, SRL, Newsweek. So-So: Mirror, Time. None in Nation. Eagle unchecked.

NOTE: Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer didn't state his preference directly.

